

Arts Take Center Stage in Downtown Elkhart

The road to revitalizing Elkhart's historic Lerner Theatre was paved with its share of unexpected twists and turns, but the performing arts center was restored to its original grandeur last June as the centerpiece of the city's new downtown arts and entertainment district.

In 1924, The Lerner debuted as a vaudeville palace, but became a proverbial shadow of its former self throughout the years.

Mayor Dick Moore notes that the restoration, which took place between 2009 and 2011 amidst a number of financial setbacks, was a bright spot for the city as it struggled to recover from the recession.

"If one defining moment turned us around and made us feel good in the hardest time many of us had ever lived through, it was the renovation of The Lerner," he declares.

The 1,700-seat landmark features a new ballroom, meeting space, extended stage area, enhanced acoustics and more. Moore asserts that the \$18 million price tag "was worth every darn dime."

"We're becoming more and more aware of the importance of art in our life, and more and more aware that you can't be a complete city unless you have things like cultural exchange



and entertainment. They have become extremely important in terms of economic draws."

Additional downtown revival efforts center on the SoMa community planning initiative, which focuses on neighborhood redevelopment in portions of South Main Street and adjoining historic blocks. SoMa's "live.work.play" philosophy is designed to attract young professionals, artists and empty nesters.

Resource: The Lerner Theatre at www.thelerner.com

A Different Kind of Entrepreneur

Posing the question, "Have you heard of Yahoo!?" to just about anyone may result in a moment of baffled silence followed by an indignant, "Of course!" But did you know that the online giant was created by a user entrepreneur?

A new report by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation reveals that nearly half of innovative start-ups operating for at least five years were founded by user entrepreneurs – individuals who turn a product created for personal use into a business.

It's an impressive statistic, considering the relatively small percentage (10.7%) of overall U.S. start-ups launched by this group.

Kauffman authors contend that user entrepreneurs enjoy several advantages over traditional entrepreneurs such as financing methods and intellectual property ownership. In addition, the study breaks user entrepreneurship into three categories: end-users (develop products or services for personal use), professional-users (develop products or services for business use) and hybrid professional/end users.

Resource: *Who Are User Entrepreneurs?* at www.kauffman.org

Shorts written by Symone C. Skrzycki

Going From Chemicals to Cultivating Business Growth

"There's nothing like it."

That's how Susan Snider describes the sprawling 7,000-plus acre site in West Central Indiana that once housed a deadly nerve agent, but is now being transformed into Vermillion Rise Mega Park.

"We have a vast amount of land, which is kind of unusual," observes Snider, Vermillion Rise marketing director. "Most towns have industrial parks where they have 100- or 200-acre parcels; we have three parcels that are over 1,000 acres (each)."

Resources such as the Wabash River aquifer (it can pump more than 100 million gallons of water a day) as well as a large supply of natural gas and electric power are especially attractive to energy production and food manufacturing businesses.

Vermillion Rise also provides logistic advantages. Located near the Indiana-Illinois border along State Road 63, it offers close proximity to Interstates 70 and 74.

Jack Fenoglio, president of the Newport Chemical Depot Reuse Authority, contends that Vermillion Rise can help create badly needed jobs.

"Vermillion County has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state," he remarks. "There are a lot of other counties right behind us. In the past, when there were government projects going on, they took employees from all over the area."

One company has already set up shop at Vermillion Rise. Newport Pallet employs seven workers, but plans to nearly triple its workforce. Future tenants, pending finalization of development agreements, include a food manufacturing company, energy firm and Delaware-based Clean Coal Refining Corp. The company would occupy approximately 1,500 acres and create 250 permanent jobs.

Resources: Susan Snider, Vermillion Rise Mega Park, at www.vermillionrise.com

Jack Fenoglio, Newport Chemical Depot Reuse Authority, at www.necdra.com

Manufacturing Initiative Building Momentum

Now hiring!
An initiative launched earlier this year – “Advancing Manufacturing: We Have Jobs Here, We Have Training Here” – is providing new jobs and unique training opportunities in Lafayette and neighboring counties.

The project is a collaboration among employers, education leaders and economic development groups in 12 counties. Here’s how it works: Manufacturers post job listings and hiring qualifications on www.advancingmanufacturing.com, which also contains a skills assessment and information on interview fairs.

“If they’re qualified, that application gets forwarded on to the company right then and there,” explains Joe Seaman, president and CEO of Greater Lafayette Commerce. “If they’re not qualified, (the web site) says, ‘These are the skill sets you need, and guess what, we have training for it!’”

Training at Ivy Tech Corporate College in Lafayette includes an eight-week, scholarship-funded Certified Production Technician program, which blends classroom and hands-on

curriculum. Employers taking part in the “We Have Jobs Here, We Have Training Here” program recognize the designation.

In addition, flexible scheduling adds convenience for those currently employed who are seeking to move up to better positions.

Residents in Benton, Carroll, Clinton, Fountain, Montgomery, Tippecanoe, Warren and White are eligible for Ivy Tech training, while individuals in the remaining four counties – Cass, Howard, Miami and Tipton – can beef up their skills at local WorkOne offices.

Seaman calls the progress thus far “absolutely amazing.”

As of late April, there were 27 participating employers, 3,600 job applicants and 80 individuals enrolled in some form of training. In addition, 40 people had been placed directly into positions.

“It’s a chance to earn a really good wage and full benefits. Plus, it’s a chance to get a better job,” Seaman emphasizes. “Everybody’s really excited.”

Changing Course: New Immigration, Migration Patterns Emerge

It’s a familiar story with a twist.
Seeking a new life, immigrants come to the United States to pursue their dreams and careers. Prior to 2005, the majority settled in California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey and Illinois. Although these states continue to be home to 65% of immigrants today, they no longer attract the highest proportion.

There are 40 million foreign-born people in the United States. According to the 2010 *American Community Survey*, a shift is underway regarding their ultimate destination, as well as their starting point. Starting in 2005, for instance, more and more immigrants have been heading to Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia and Wyoming.

So, where do they come from?

Prior to 2005, Latin America supplied 54% of immigrants, compared to 41% starting in 2008. Similarly, the number of individuals arriving from Mexico has dropped from 30.4% to 19.3%.

Nine countries have led the way since 2008 in terms of immigrants’ original homes. They are (in order) Mexico, China, India, the Philippines, Korea (both), Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam and El Salvador.

Hitch a Ride ... Aboard the ‘Spirit of Jasper’

Hear that? It’s the “Spirit of Jasper” roaring down train tracks in Southern Indiana with tourists in tow.

All adventures begin at Jasper Train Depot. Adorned with early 1900’s-era décor modeled after a (now demolished) local turn-of-the century depot, it exudes nostalgia.

The Spirit of Jasper boasts three luxurious vintage passenger cars and seats 120 people. French Lick, just under two hours away, is among travelers’ favorite destinations. The train departs Jasper in the morning and returns in the evening, leaving plenty of time to visit casinos, a winery and other tourist attractions.

Additional excursions include “ride and dines” (passengers are treated to a meal on the 18-mile roundtrip outing) and the annual summer Jasper Strassenfest German festival. It features music, food, a parade and more.

“We’ll do short trips for kids on Friday evening and Saturday during the day,” shares Lois Kuntz, assistant to Jasper Mayor Terry Seitz. “That’s been really popular. We sell out of those every year.”

Nostalgia, she contends, plays a big role in drawing tourists to the Spirit of Jasper.

“It’s the uniqueness,” she remarks, “the look of the cars, the luxury. They’re just beautiful works of art, and the experience of riding a train is not something you do every day.”

Resource: Spirit of Jasper at www.spiritofjasper.com

